

# MUNICIPAL PROGRESS IN LOS ANGELES, CAL.

Some of the Unique Features Which Have  
Been Incorporated in the City Gov-  
ernment of That Far Away  
Western Community.

In his address before the National Municipal League in New York Friday, Charles D. Willard gave the following history of "Municipal Progress in Los Angeles."

"Los Angeles, although established by the Spaniards a century and a quarter ago, is, as an American city, not much over twenty-five years old. In those twenty-five years its population has increased from 11,000 to 175,000 and with that growth a steady improvement has been worked out in municipal government. One of the most important recent events was the acquisition by the city, in 1892, of the water system, up to that time owned by private parties. Since the change rates have been reduced until they are lower than in any city west of Denver and an annual profit has been earned sufficient to meet interest and sinking fund on the purchase price and put nearly half a million dollars yearly into betterments. Other recent events in the development of the city which may be of sufficient general interest to merit consideration are: The adoption of direct legislation, or the initiative and referendum, an experiment with the recall, which is a method by which an unsatisfactory public servant may be removed from office; the establishment of civil service through all the departments and including the registration of laborers, the radical revision of the fundamental

law of the city by a process of bi-annual amendment, the working out of a new plan for the elimination of poles and wires, and the establishment on a solid foundation of a municipal organization which has achieved remarkable victories in the political field. The municipal organization is to come into the key to all the rest. This organization has a membership of 5,000 and an annual income of \$6,000, while no difficulty is experienced in raising additional sums for specific purposes, \$5,000 being subscribed in three days for the last city campaign. California is one of the four States in the Union that enjoys the blessing of local self-government for cities and thus the main gateway to reform is kept clear. If the people of any city fail to secure the best available system of government, they have no one but themselves to blame. Taking advantage of the self-governing system, the progressive element in the city government of Los Angeles set about the reorganization of the fundamental law of the city. Under the old charter the executive functions were vested with a series of commissions appointed by the city council. The mayor was a member of these various commissions, but was in other respects a mere figurehead. The appointment and power of removal of these commissions was transferred to the mayor, thus clothing him with direct authority

and responsibility. A civil service commission was established and the competitive merit system was put in force, in nearly every department of the city's service. The board of education was changed from nine members, elected one from each ward, to seven, elected at large. The initiative, referendum and recall were put in force. These constituted the principal parts in the first batch of amendments which went up to the legislature in 1902. That body balked at the direct legislation features and the recall and the competitive merit system, and it looked for a time as though the amendments might fail of passage. They went into force, however, in February of that year.

The second installment of changes were adopted last fall and accepted by the legislature after a six week hold up. The referendum features of these are: (1), the transferring of the time of city elections to the non-political years, that is to say away from the years of Presidential or State and county elections; (2), the establishment of a permanent non-partisan board of public works, that feature of the city's business having heretofore rested with a committee of the council with most unfortunate results; (3), the extension of the civil service to all departments and including the registration of laborers; (4), abolition of the elective office of street superintendent, making it a department under the board of public works; (5), the preliminary steps toward the consolidation of city and county assessors and tax collector; (6), limitation of railway franchises to twenty-one years.

The mere enumeration of these changes will indicate no doubt the extent to which the whole system was out of true when the work of reformation began, and there is no need to explain that evils so fundamental and of so long standing cannot be remedied by the mere enactment of laws. The adoption of a competitive merit system for example does not mean the immediate establishment of a highly competent municipal service—time and eternal vigilance and an educated public sentiment all are needed to the working out of that end. The Los Angeles civil service commission has adopted stringent rules with respect

to the participation in politics of city employees, and a practical demonstration was given of the working of these rules by the removal of several violators. Heretofore our city conventions have been largely dominated by direct city hall influences, and the caucuses and primaries and polls on election day have been run by city employees. This practice has now ceased with a marked improvement in the field of city politics. The fear experienced by many partisan workers that under the new regime nobody would be left to manage politics has been shown to be entirely baseless, for a great body of citizens that heretofore manifested but little interest in such matters are now making up and taking an active hand. The direct legislation provision of the charter has been actually used but once so far, in the case of the enlargement of the area in which packing houses might be erected. It is to be employed again in connection with the anti-saloon movement. Twice the required number of signatures has been obtained to petition to submit to the voters the question of the abolishment of saloons.

"It will come to a vote and the people having given their decision the Supreme Court will be appealed to for a ruling on the constitutionality of direct legislation. But the entirely unique feature of the Los Angeles charter is the recall. It is a plan whereby if twenty-five per cent. of an elective officers constituents sign a statement to the effect that they are dissatisfied with his course, an election is called forthwith and he must contest for the place as to the remainder of the term, with any that may be nominated against him. The recall has been actually used once and public opinion now strongly favors the system. Its value as a permanent political institution cannot be determined by one experiment, but there are certain objections that were offered to the system before its adoption which our two years of experience with it seem to have abolished. One was that it would discourage good men from seeking office. Two months after the recall election, the regular municipal nominating conventions were held and a larger percentage of good men

(Continued on fourth page)

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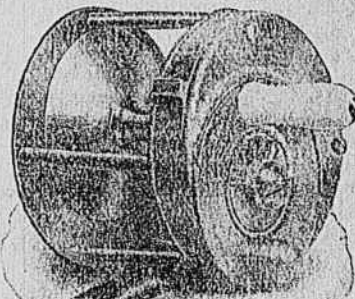
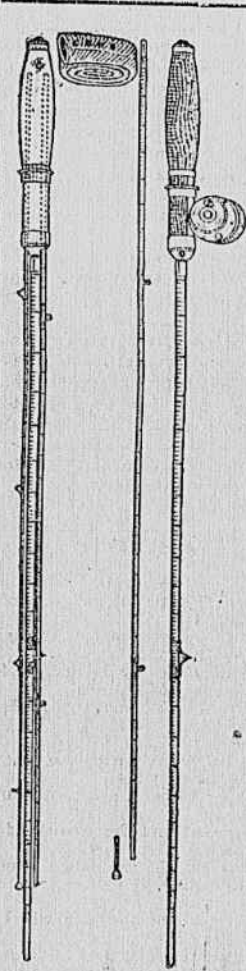
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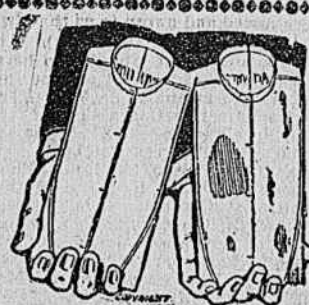
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